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3

4

Building Blocks for an Early Learning Community

Leaders in communities across the country recognize the importance of ensuring that young children and their families thrive – they understand that child well-being and thriving communities go hand-in-hand. Elected officials, business and civic leaders, parents and residents from all walks of life are working to create true Early Learning Communities – that is, places that promote learning and development prenatally through the early years of elementary school, making sure that the “building blocks” for early and lifelong success are in place.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and the National League of Cities (NLC) have developed an *Early Learning Community Action Guide* designed to help communities focus their efforts around four key building blocks. Each building block is divided into three to six targets, describing the ideal conditions you would see when that building block is in place in a community.

Becoming an Early Learning Community

Becoming an Early Learning Community is an ongoing process, where there are always opportunities to make progress. The building blocks that make up your community need to be aligned, bolstered and assembled in a way that builds on the strengths of the community, recognizes the challenges families face and addresses disparities across racial, ethnic, sociodemographic and/or geographic lines in the community.

Ensuring that All Children Thrive:

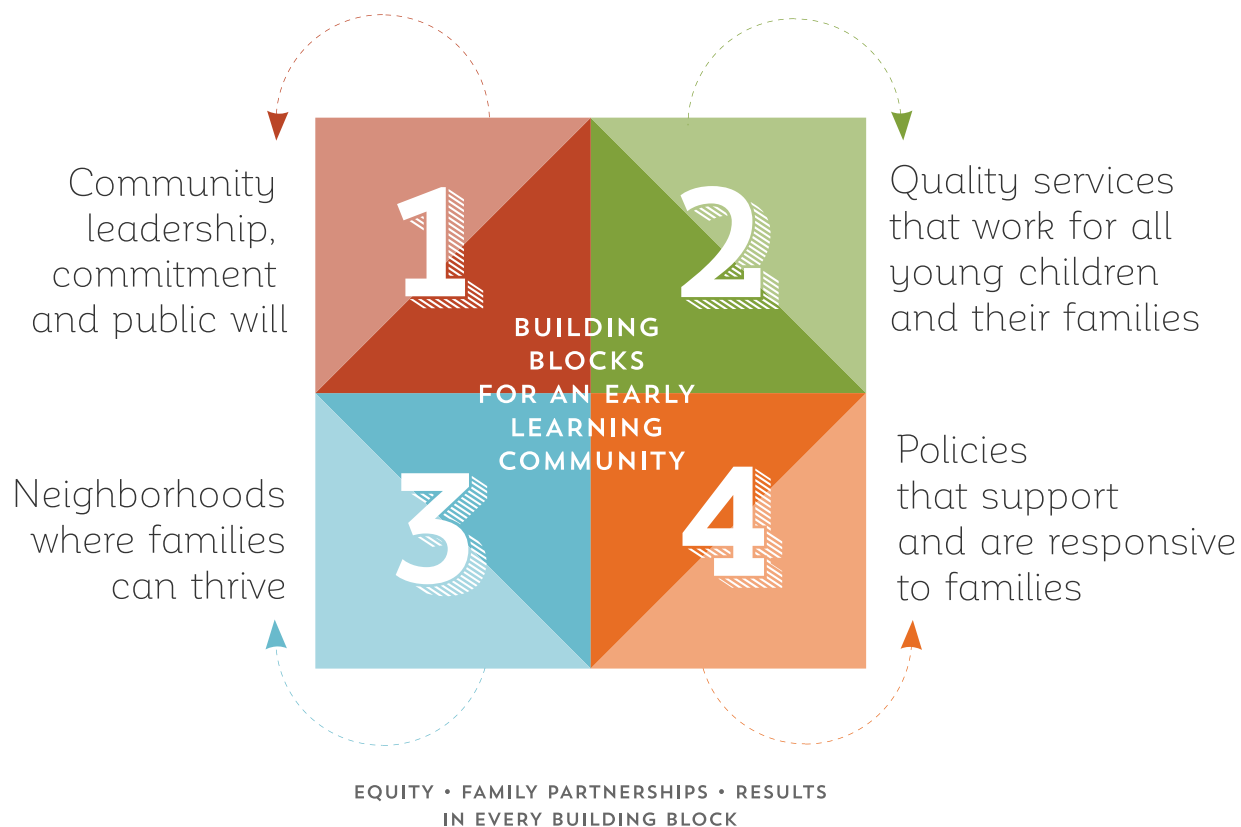
The “North Star” for Early Learning Communities

The goal of an Early Learning Community is to ensure that all young children get a great start, setting the foundations for life-long success and well-being. An Early Learning Community employs targeted strategies to ensure that all children, families and communities have equitable opportunities to reach the kind of results that every parent wants for his or her child. We define these results in three broad categories:

- Pregnant women and young children are healthy.
- Children are ready to succeed in school.
- Children live in safe, stable and nurturing families and communities.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR EARLY LEARNING COMMUNITY

1. Identify one or more champions – that might be you!
2. Pull together stakeholders with an interest in early childhood.
3. Designate a person to coordinate efforts, make connections across partners and keep the work moving.
4. Use the Progress Rating Tool to determine how well your community is progressing toward each of the targets of the building blocks.
5. Develop an Action Plan focusing on a few building blocks or targets where you would like to advance to a higher level.
6. Engage parents, service providers and community residents in developing plans to move your community to a higher level.
7. Regularly review your community’s status on the progress rating tool as your community takes actions and makes progress. Determine where your community wants to go next and assess what actions will take you to the next level.



BUILDING BLOCK #1

Community leadership, commitment and public will to make early childhood a priority

- **Target 1.1** Local leaders work together across systems with a focus on early childhood.
- **Target 1.2** The community invests in young children and families.
- **Target 1.3** Community members support and understand the importance of early childhood health, learning and well-being.
- **Target 1.4** A rich network of informal supports is available for all families.
- **Target 1.5** Community resources for children and families are well-known, accessible and easy to use.

BUILDING BLOCK #2

Quality services that work for all young children and their families

- **Target 2.1** Families have access to high-quality, basic services that proactively promote and support health, learning and family strengths.
- **Target 2.2** All children receive routine screening, identification, referral and linkage for additional risks and needs.
- **Target 2.3** Children and families at risk and those with identified needs have timely access to more intensive services.
- **Target 2.4** Families and parents are actively engaged as partners.
- **Target 2.5** Supports are in place for service providers.
- **Target 2.6** Leaders use data to drive change.

BUILDING BLOCK #3

Neighborhoods where families can thrive

- **Target 3.1** The built environment promotes safety and allows families to access basic services in their neighborhoods and beyond.
- **Target 3.2** Economic and employment opportunities are available to all.
- **Target 3.3** Residents feel a sense of belonging and hope within their neighborhoods and connection to the broader community.

BUILDING BLOCK #4

Policies that support and are responsive to families

- **Target 4.1** Policies that govern child and family services are equitable and responsive.
- **Target 4.2** Workplace and other policies support families in raising children.
- **Target 4.3** Land use and community development policies are designed with consideration for how they affect young children and families.

Throughout your journey to becoming an Early Learning Community, no matter where you are or what action steps you choose to take, you will need to consider how to:

- advance equity
- promote partnerships with families
- determine whether you are achieving results